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ABSTRACT

Narrowly defining reading as a list of skills dealing with word attack and letter sounds is potentially crippling to readers, because it limits the instruction provided by those who write literature--authors, who, in creating text, create meaning. The nature of reading instruction should not structure the ways human beings come to deal with literature; rather, the purposes arrived at when dealing with literature should form the basis of reading instruction. The qestion of why one reads is more important than the question of how one reads. When reading, people choose, in more conscious ways, those aspects of their personal lives that they will let help structure the meanings of the reading experience. This focus on the interaction between reader and text is crucial, for without such interaction there could be no transfer of meaning. Reading is a constructive process in which the reader builds the author's structure, or at least a personal version of it. An overemphasis on diagnostics and prescription leads to the view of individuals as machines whose parts need to be repaired or replaced, and to overuse of skill-sequence exercises that do not really teach children how to read. Teaching mastery of separate skills should thus be only an aid to better reading, and not an end unto itself. (NKA)

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Thoughts About Reading by a Non-Specialist

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Although I have a graduate degree in Reading Education, I have not taught university reading courses for almost twelve years. I have, however, remained a critic of reading education. I have seen some good, new ideas discussed over the past few years, and I have seen the retention of some sound reading practices; but, I have also seen an increase in what I have considered institutionalized narrow mindedness.

Particularly, I have seen reading broken into pieces and sold like so many candy bars to hungry kids. The ideas outlined in the following paper have been developed over the course of the past decade, as I have viewed the field of reading education from the outside, no longer from the inside. While in a formal sense I am no longer a reading educator, my students continue to read in my courses. They also continue to teach their students to read in junior high and senior high schools. Plus, my own children, spanning the years from grade two to junior high school, continue to read in school. I continue to be interested in the field of reading. Obviously, I am still interested in contributing to the discussion of what reading education can and should be.

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I have always been in a state of wonder about how human beings communicate with each other. Particularly when I consider the potential blocks to communication, I am amazed that people ever understand each other. Probably it is the uncompromising desire that people have to know each other and to understand themselves that is the biggest facilitating force to communication. This wonder, this amazement at people's ability to understand and to know each other, despite the strong odds against such attempts, gives me a particular viewpoint about reading. Primarily, it is a viewpoint grounded in optimism and opportunity. It is a viewpoint that looks at what reading can do rather than what it can't.

Many reading experts talk of reading as though it were some mechanical skill or list of skills. Such a look at reading is word-focused rather than people-focused and misses most of the essence of the activity, which is people communicating with each other.

Pedagogically, reading curricula often focuses on what students can not do (ie. they can't break words into syllables, or use context clues). But what is reading? It ought to celebrate communication.

My contention is that reading is much more than a series of skills that the reader learns. Reading involves the reader getting in touch with the lives, ideas, and feelings of other

humans. My belief is that reading is much more of an art than it is a mechanical skill because it involves more the aesthetic than the mechanical. Such thinking puts me clearly out-of-line with most university people who specialize in reading. Consequently, discussing reading with collegues is difficult. There are few people to talk to because, I believe, that there are many more people "doing" reading than "talking about" reading.

Reading: A New Discussion

The intention of this paper is to discuss reading in a new way. Reading, I believe, has been stripped of power by those without a big enough vision, by those who, in their definitions and in their work, think too narrowly. There is a tendency for reading specialists to become too special, too narrow. There is also a tendency to believe that reading is specialities added together. These thinkers would have us believe that reading is a list of skills dealing with word attacks and letter sounds. Such a definition of reading, because it is too narrow, is potentially crippling to readers. It can cripple those of us who read because it limits the instruction that we have by learned teachers--those who write literature. It limits what is taught and, in doing so, it limits our perceptions. It narrows us, as humans, because it denies us

the opportunity to communicate with a wide variety of other human beings, those who write.

Reading is, and should be thought of, as a human activity. Even if we think of reading as only a textual activity--be sure it is even though this paper will only discuss text interpretation--that activity is in both the first and the last instance human. Someone wrote the text. This statement is simple, almost banal, but crucial to an understanding of reading. It is quite different than the zen-like puzzle "If a tree falls in the forest and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound." No one caused the tree to fall; but, in the first instance, the author (a human) CREATED the text.

In creating text, the author creates meaning. This is no simple task, the creation of meaning, and it is crucial to our understanding of reading. From this first point the creation of meaning, it follows that the text, from its original conception, has always contained meaning, even from the author's first thought. The falling of the tree in the forest does not, necessarily, contain meaning. In order for this meaning to occur, we must rewrite the puzzle to say "If a tree is pushed over (cut down) by a person in a forest and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound?" The statement is ludicrous, prima facia, because the person who cut or who pushed the tree was there. In reading a text, like in pushing

a tree over, the author was, in the first instance, there.

Because the author was there, the text has meaning. The reader comes to a text which contains a meaningful essence, not a sterility. The reader, therefore, if he or she is to interpret this text, cannot simply dismiss the author. If the reader did, there simply would not be a fidelity between text and interpretation. And in reading, like in music, the higher the fidelity the cleaner the transfer of meaning. The reader's task, if he or she is to understand the text, is to, in part, come to understand the author. All this has been said before in other ways. Kenneth Goodman and Frank Smith have talked about this interchange between author and reader on many occasions. The message is simple but the implications are enormous. In order for a reader to understand a text, the reader must, at least in part, understand the author.

However, simply saying that the reader must come to understand the author's meaning, and that the better the fidelity of the understanding the better the interpretation, does not tell us about the whole of reading, even though most reading practice works on this notion. It is at this point that I suggest that the typical rhetoric about reading falls short of describing reading. Most reading experts stop here at the concept of comprehension and spend their time focusing on the perfection of techniques aimed at helping readers become

better prepared to interpret texts and authors. This help is good but it is not enough. If we choose to understand reading as comprehending we spend far too little time discussing what the reader does with the information after he or she knows the words. It is like teaching a child the difference between food and house plants but not telling the child that food is to eat. We may have knowledge, but it could be for no purpose. Much of our reading instruction fails on these very grounds. Much time is spent on sounds, graphics, and even word comprehension; but, the activity has little purpose. To learn sounds, graphics, and words is to learn almost nothing. It is an insipid literalness where pictures take the place of the real thing. It reminds me, in its starkness, of a new subdivision where there are finished roads but no people yet. It is not reading in its fullest sense. It lacks power.

If words were all there were to reading, there would be no literature. Literature is not a practice math problem. Authors did not write so that school children could practice sounds. Authors wrote because they wanted to say something, because they held a meaning and either wanted to validate this experience for themselves or wanted to share it with others.

Good literature is good literature for a variety of reasons, but only seldom do these reasons have to do with the narrow perceptual experiences of sounds and graphics. Good

literature (that literature which makes contributions to people's lives) is good literature because it inspires our humanity at both the most basic level and the highest level. When we read such writing, we reach intellectual and spiritual highs in our personal life experiences. We can become stimulated to think novel thoughts; we can become inspired to create new ideas; and we can be moved in our souls to peaks (and vallies) where we have never been before. We relax the armour of our person, on our own terms, and we communicate with another human being, in various levels of communication, often from posterity. In fiction, we often communicate generally with characters that the author has created out of some feeling that the author has had. Even non-fiction, if characters are involved (biography-autobiography) offers us this unique opportunity for personal interaction. But, the basic point is simple. When we read we interact. Good literature allows us, even at times forces us, to interact.

Reading and Literature

What is the interplay between reading and literature? Those who treat reading as a skills exercise, almost a cosmology of skills that must be learned prior to "correct" reading, are often guilty of making literature the slave of reading. Reading must be done in a certain way to be correct.

Generally, these skills approach to reading causes the act of reading to dominate the thoughts of literature.

Such a view supports the empiricist who only believes in the truth of immanent response to stimulus. To the empiricist, the importance of literature lies in the importance of the act of reading - the sights, the sounds, the eye movements. Those things that constitute the act, what we call the lower end of reading, can more easily be measured. And, because the empirical, experimental tradition posits much merit in measurement, what can be measured becomes important. The logic of the argument is contained in the sylogism:

(A) The reading act is an experience that can be measured

(B) Those experiences which can be measured are important for helping us understand the world

(C) Therefore, the part of reading that can be measured is important to help us understand the world

However, there is another premise that, I believe, suggests a more accurate relationship between reading and literature. I suggest that the nature of reading instruction should not structure the ways that human beings come to deal with literature; rather, the puposes that one comes to dealing

with literature should form the basis of reading instruction. The question of why one reads is more basic and more important than the question of how one reads.

Consider the ludicrous nature of the following few statements. At one point in the history of humans, a group of enterprising young thinkers got together and decided that they needed an activity that would take up that time when they suffered from insomnia. Maybe they had gored by a wild pig that day or maybe they had gotten ahold of a bunch of bad roots for dinner. Nevertheless, they couldn't sleep and they wanted something to do. So, by and by, one of the young men said "Why don't we invent reading?" So they did. Then, after they had invented reading for awhile, another of the young men said, "This is OK. But wouldn't it be better if we had something to read". To this, the group all agreed. So, after thinking for awhile, they decided to invent writing so they could have something to read. This worked well and, after some development, the young men had something fulfilling to do in their hours before sleep came.

The previous story is silly, but it represents the perverted way the reading instruction is taught in almost every school in North America. Reading instruction has become an end in itself. Literature, a human activity that is often inspirational, often passionate, and often deals directly with

problems of humans, is used as a series of skill-testing questions suitable to test the appropriate reading skill. Imagine the New Testament, or any other book of religious and social significance, being used in a Grade six classroom for diphthong practice. This question is not which came first the chicken or the egg question, this question is about the predominance of either reading or literature, because reading did not come first. Reading, in the skills sense, only exists as a function to understand those meanings imbedded in writing.

What Is Literature?

I have already alluded to literature by suggesting some of literature's impact on people. And, in following these initial comments, one of the ways that literature can be defined is to suggest what literature does. Literature, literary discourse, Kinneavy (A Theory of Discourse) points out, provides us with a view of life throught art. It is important that literature, like art, is a medium. That literature is media is important to understand literatures purpose.

Media are those things through which action is accomplished. Authors of literature, like advertisers and rock groups, use a medium that allows them to accomplish a particular purpose. The recognition that literature exists because someone wanted to accomplish a purpose underscores the

existence of meaning from the moment of creation. In recognizing that literature is a medium, the notion of what reading is becomes clearer. Reading is an action on a particular medium. And since it is absurd to act upon something that does not exist, reading is an act upon an already exisitng medium. Literature must come before reading, if not reading in terms of reading literature would be impossible.

The author has created the medium of literary discourse, Kinneavy suggests, in order to portray a view of life through art. Whose life is this view of? The question could be thought to be only practical since we are discussing a very commonplace occurance like reading. However, the question is also philosophical because, at the heart of reading literature is a transcendence of experience that is far removed from the practical affairs of our regular, human understanding.

Think of your favorite author. Does he or she know you? Have you met and talked? And, if you have, have your conversations led this person to write a particular piece of literary discourse and dedicate it just to you? If so, you may certainly say, like Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning, that this literary creator wrote <u>just for you</u>. Few, if any of us, have had such power or influence with a particular author. However, I have heard people say that a particular author wrote

"just for me." What did they mean?

Certainly none of the great writers of antiquity wrote for any of those of us alive today. They never knew that we existed. Still, they have much to say to us. I have discovered personal and individual meaning from reading Aeschylus, Euripides, and even Homer. I continue to learn, and teach, using Aristotle's category systems. They wrote "for me" though they never met me, and I can understand them and can come to know them though I never spoke to them--we wouldn't even speak the same language. How is it that this is so? Literature is, simply, the great transcendence.

Literature, all discourse that is literary, has the potential power to rise above the temporal limits that esoteric living places upon us. Literature gives us a view of life that transcends time, death, language, an physique. Aeschylus can tell me, personally, about Greek life. Furthermore, I can understand him and use my gained understanding to some advantage, all in spite of the fact that Aeschylus is dust and hasn't spoken for thousands of years. The transcendent nature of literature, while so common to be almost ignored, is so maginificantly powerful that, when thought of, it allows us to participate in an almost miraculous communication. Thinking of literature as a medium useful for practicing reading skills, as an end in themselves, is tantamount to sacrilege. Profanity in

the school takes on a different meaning when thought of in this light.

What Is Reading?

Already in this paper, I have discussed, at some length, the nature of reading. To be more specific, I have stated quite bluntly that reading, as I see it, is generally thought of in too narrow a fashion by the "so-called" reading experts. These experts, in my opinion, are reading experts in only a small portion of a reading process that they see rooted in a selected group of reading skills. In their area, small though it be, these people are experts. I do not take their knowledge away from them. They have it: they know their stuff. But, what is the stuff that they know? From what I read they know skills, not reading.

I have an acquaintance who claims to be the expert of the flashcard. When he said this, it was impossible to tell whether or not he was kidding; but, I believe he was serious. He wanted, he suggested, to have his niche in life, to have knowledge that no other person had, and to become the leader of flashcard research. Besides, he went on, somebody has to know all about them. He may, by this time, be an expert in flash cards. However, even if he is, he is not an expert in reading--only one small part of reading. Flashcards are

useful, but they are not reading.

To be truthful, I do not know if there are really any reading experts. I admit that I am not an expert and, I guess, I doubt the ability of anyone to be a true reading expert. The task is almost impossible because the area is so broad. Being an expert in all aspects of reading is like being an expert in all areas of history, or religion, or philosohpy. Reading is a broad area, much broader than most people realize. I tend to hold suspect any person who claims expertise in the entire area.

Probably, people have a narrow conception of reading because we seem to speak of reading in a variety of ways, most of them very simplistic. For example, an encyclopedia will report the percentage of world literacy, that is how many people can read. A mother can tell at what age her child can read. Teachers often feel like failures if their students cannot read by the end of grade one. Notable literary critics like Kenneth Burke and W.H. Auden speak of reading Emerson or Pope. When people say that they can read, I really do not know what they mean.

A similar analogy exists whenever we speak of any ability in generic terms even though there is a wide variance in the ableness of the individual to perform the task spoken about. Many examples can come quickly to mind. What does it mean to

be able to play hockey? Does it mean to know the rules and to have some basic ability move on skates and hit the puck with your stick? Even in pro hockey, there is a great variance of abilities among the players. There are few Wayne Gretzkys. However, all of the players can play hockey. I play basketball, unless I am battered or broken, on the average of 2-3 times per week. I can, on a level, play basketball. However, I am not Dr. J (Juluis Erving) or Karen Abdul Jabbar. But on occasion, I run down the court, catch a pass from a teammate, shoot and make it. There are also a great variety of ableness occurs. A short list includes: play the piano, drive a car, sing, theorize about the physical universe, grow tomatoes, build a garage, and cook a gormet meal. In short, reading should be thought of broadly. Furthermore, people's abilities to read varies widely.

Most people, when they think of reading, think of a skill that enables them to understand, to some degree or another, written markings of the language that they commonly speak. Reading, from this view, allows people to reproduce sounds from symbols and, to a degree, understand surface meanings that are expressed in symbolic form. By surface meanings, I am speaking of literal translation ability. The question to be answered, from this view point, is "What does the word (or group of words) mean?"

The ability to make literal translations of symbols is, certainly, one aspect of reading. But, reading is more than just this ability. Research and theorizing on the nature of reading and how reading is learned indicates that the reader, at all variances in ability, searches for personal meaning and uses whatever background information he or she possess to find this meaning. Readers, in other words, already possess meaning, the meaning of their lives up to the point of this reading, and use this personal meaning to help them make some sense of the symbols that they are reading. To say that readers use their backgrounds to understand symbolic, literary language is not to say that reading is a behavioristic activity. The underlying assumption of behaviorism is that the agent (person) upon which the stimulus works has no choice but to respond except in certain ways. When a particular stimulus works on the person, the person has no choice but to reply in certain manners. Such is not the case in reading.

When reading, people choose, in more conscious ways, those aspects of their personal lives that they will let help structure the meanings of the reading experience. Depending upon the reason for reading, readers can draw upon or refuse to draw upon certain aspects of their backgrounds to make meaning from the interaction between themselves and the written text. The focus on the interaction between reader and text is

crucial, without such interaction there could be no transfer of meaning.

Meaning already exists in the writing, because the written word was written by an author who had meaning. Meaning already exists in readers because readers have learned a great variety of things since their birth. The author contains meaning: the reader contains meaning. The meeting of two meaning makers over a literature produces change in both, the author's text and the readers growth.

Explain Reading

Depending upon individual orientations, reading can be defined very narrowly or very broadly. For a small child, reading may be turning the pages of The Three Bears. For a first grade student, reading may mean being able to recognize some words by sight. Even among adults there is a widespread disagreement over the nature of reading. Some educators define reading simply as the decoding of a system of written symbols into sounds. Reed (1970, p. 222) for example, states that reading "is the identification of linguistic forms from strings of written configurations that represent them..." Reed's definition of reading equates reading with knowing the sounds of words. In such a definition of reading, understanding language is not involved.

In contrast to this narrow definition are definitions that are more consonant with cognitive learning theory. Reading, defined cognitively, can be seen as a conceptualized response to a printed word stimulus (Russell, 1956). In Russell's definition, the semantic-symbolic message of a written work is of prime importance. Readers actively carry themselves and their past experiences to the written message and interpret it. During this personal interpretation, readers draw meaning from both the message and its relationship to their own experiences. In a sense, the author's message has meaning only to the extent that readers can fit it into a structure built from their personal experiences.

This section of the paper will explore a cognitive definition of reading and discuss the implications of defining reading from such a perspective. Reading is defined as "the active process of constructing meaning from language represented by graphic symbols (letters) systematically arranged." (Smith, Goodman, & Meredith; 1975 p. 265). Reading will be discussed as the process of a reader gaining meaning from the symbolic expression of a sender.

Sense-Making

The first basic assumption that is fundamental to any discussion about reading is that people try to make sense of

their world. Much of what people do is directed toward the goal of seeking to understand. Sense-making is an activity that is practised by each individual as that individual organizes and/or accepts an organization that tends to categorize experiences into a framework for personal understanding. As this framework is built (sometimes the process is very gradual), the individual is constantly refining and eleborating the categorizations as new experiences are incorporated. Smith (1975, p. 11-12) calls this framework a "theory of the world in the head" and likens it to a scientific theory which (1) summarizes and organizes past experience, (2) influences perception and interpretation of new data, and (3) provides for expectations and prediction of the future.

Much work has been done that suggests language is one of the basic tools that aids sense-making by an individual. The search for meaning is central to the development of language. Children begin with the unconscious hypothesis that language is meaningful and proceed to try to figure out language by relating it to what they know and can observe about the world around them. Children will draw conclusions about <u>why</u> people use language and, assuming they feel the need themselves, will determine specifically <u>how</u> they will use it.

The relationship between thought and language is a complex one. While the development of thought and cognition does not

depend exclusively upon the development of language, there can be little doubt that language both enables us to better control thought and to test thought. Sapir, Vygotsky, and Bruner see language both as a means by which we learn to take part in the life of the communities we belong to and as a means by which we can actively reinterpret the world around us. Through language we both receive a meaningful world from others and, at the same time, make meanings by reinterpreting the world to our own ends. (Barnes, 1976, p. 101)

The act of reading is also one method an individual uses to make sense of the world. In a way, reading is more important than language in this sense-making venture because people choose to read in a much more active sense than they choose to speak. In our society, the choice not to learn how to read or not to rigorously read is a value decision that has important implications. Reading has many uses: it is primarily, however, an important source of information and meaning. For an individual to choose not to gather information in this manner--when the opportunities are so great--is a choice not to expand one's knowledge or a choice not to attempt new meanings.

The Use of Language

Language is indispensible in the development and refinement of the organizational structures we use in making

sense of our world. Wherever and whenever people enter new experiences and construct new meanings, language plays an essential role because of its potential for making the "floating meanings" of the author concrete for the reader or the listener. Language facilitates discovery by crystallizing experience; it makes reflection possible because it enable us to represent our understandings to ourselves so that we can explore and modify them.

The difference between reading and other uses of language is important in this context. In expressive and communcation activities, reflection generally occurs at a speed other than a speed chosen by the listener. For example, watching a TV show or listening to a recording of music implies that the listener or the viewer must choose those portions out of a large number of portions that he or she wishes to reflect upon or the listener or the viewer must keep up with the speed of the interaction. The speed of the communication is already set.

In reading, however, the reader chooses the speed of interaction and thus the speed of thought and reflection. The reader is in far greater control of the communicative experience. Most readers have been reading a passage and have - all of a sudden - become aware that they have been mechanically reading but not consciously interacting with the text. They have become engrossed in a meaning that the author

has made several paragraphs earlier and they have been reflecting upon the meaning of the communication. When this situation occurs, readers must pull themselves out of the thought and must again proceed to systematically and mechanically read. The mechanics and the reflective explorations must, once again, start to work together.

In addition to its potential for crystallizing experience, language--both oral and reading--may also serve to put a person in touch with personal thoughts and emotions. Language and reading have the ability to bring to the surface thoughts that individuals consider insightful and new. In language use, the communication may be on of a serendipity nature--one of happenstance. During a discussion, a thought is often communicated that is novel for either one or both of the participants. Reading can serve the same function. However, one basic difference is that when reading the reader more assertively chooses to seek those novel thoughts. The use of oral language is much more common; we communicate orally with others to a far greater extent than we read. Reading is something that is done less often, for most people, and is an activity that is sought after assertivley. That is, a reader asserts his personal choice to read. A book is never a subject that comes to a person and demands to be read; the reader goes to the written book in an attempt to gain meaning. The reader

chooses the environment in which he or she will read; the reader chooses the material; and, within personal capabilities, the reader chooses the speed at which he or she will read.

Reading As Expressive

Reading in thus expressive. It is expressive in the sense that the reader is expressing a personal desire to gain meaning. Both communication and expression are present in all language. Pure expression, detached from all communication, is imposssible in reading because all reading expresses is an aim--interaction between a reader and a writer. Interaction is essential to reading. Likewise, the idea of communication without expression of a personal nature is senseless because a person's language can never be completely taken away. Even if a person simply repeats someone else's words, an example being in the memorization of a poem, the repeater assents by implication and takes the poet's words as his or her own. Refusal to speak, or to read, is also an expressive act as well as a communicative one. Communication refers to the spirit and the attitude of the participants as well as the words of the interaction.

Both language and reading can be viewed as both product an process. In language, the product is the utterance and it is located entirely in the outside world. In reading, the piece

of written work is the product and, such, it exists also in the outside world. In both cases (language and reading) the process is more personally meaningful and much less precise. Located within the cognitive structure of the individual as a part of "the theory of the world in the head," the processes of both language and reading enables the participant to make sense of the product that exists in the world and to produce meaning in him or herself.

Language and Meaning

Although language and meaning are unique to each individual, essentially these processes are "not of one but of many; it is (they are) between. It (they) expresses the relational being of man" (Gusdorfl, 1977, p. 126). Although Gusdorf speaks about language specifically, reading is also an interaction. Communication is usually regarded as the main function of language and, because we are not alone, we direct our language outward at the other. Even when we talk to ourselves, we regard ourselves as the other. In this sense, we can communicate from ourselves to ourselves.

Effective communication requires that the sender and the receiver share certain association. In order to be understood, the speaker must use the language of the listener. The speaker cannot deny his or her own language but, if the speaker desires

to be understood by a larger audience, the objective realities of established language are more suited to communication.

A writer, in the same sense, is caught between the creative use of personal esoteric language and the banalities of common language for effect (i.e. J. R. Tolkien, Anthony Burgess, William Faulkner) the effect has largely been the effect of style rather than the effect of meaning. Most effective writers (those writers whose efforts are charged with meaning) use a combination of personal, creative language and lanugage of a common sort--language that many readers can understand.

If the reader and the author share associations, if the two can "connect" the intended meaning will likely be understood on a literal level. Deeper meanings are more difficult to convey accurately because they typically rely more on associations and connotative meanings of words. For example, much poetry would make little sense if read purely for a literal meaning. Reading both between and beyond the lines requires more participation by the reader; the end result is determined increasingly by the reader's contribution.

> Reading is neither imformation transfer nor totally determined by what the reader brings to the process. Reading involves a meaningful interaction between the language and thought patterns of the author and the language and thought patterns of the reader. Readers must access available information if they are to process print at a level that can be called reading" (Harste and Birle. 1978, p. 25)

The more that the reader wills to understand - to make meaning - the more meaningful the reading will become. Reading is an interactional compromise to the extent that neither the author, as stated earlier, nor can the reader can build walls around their privacy. Writers must be willing to alter their creativity to some extent and, likewise, readers must be willing to accept new ideas. Mortimer J. Adler (1940, p. 14) almost classically describes how the will to understand can affect an individual's reading. He states:

> When they are in love and are reading a love letter, they read for all they are worth. They read every word three ways; they read between the lines and in the margins; they read the whole in terms of the parts, and each part in terms of the whole; they grow sensitive to context and ambiguity, to insinuation and implications; they perceive the color of words, the odor of phrases, and the weight of sentences. They may even take the punctuation into account. Then, if never before or after, they read.

Alder's statement describes, in the same manner as Smith, Goodman, and Meredith's statement (1975, p. 277) the interactive process that takes place between the reader and the material to be read. They state:

> What the reader brings to the language he is reading is as important as the cues in the language itself. The message does not exist in the language. Language carries the message from the writer, but it must be recreated by the reader out of the raw material within himself.

This raw material described above includes language facility, physical capacity, conceptual background, ability, and

experiential background. To some extent, one's language will affect one's relation to reality. Whorf (1956) developed a theory of "linguistic relativity" which asserts that thought and perception are shaped by the form of the language used. The individual is constrained to certain modes of interpretation by language. One implication of this view of language is that language is purposive, dynamic, and value-laden and that there is more to language than literal meaning (Parsons, 1975, p. 8). Reading, as an expressive language, must also be purposive, dynamic, and value-laden; reading must also focus on more than literal meaning.

Depending upon what the reader can comprehend, on what he or she is predisposed to expect, and on personal perceptions and interpretations of the words used including the values and the assumptions attached to these words, the reader will construct a meaning from the material. This constructed meaning will be the material's meaning for the reader and for the reader alone. The meaning for one reader will not be precisely the same as the meaning for anyone else, including that of the author. It will be synergistic in the sense that the meaning will be greater than the meaning of the author and the meaning of the reader; it will be an integration of both meanings.

Reading, then, is a constructive process. The reader

builds the author's structure, or at least his or her personal version of it, while in the process of reading. Reading is also a creative process. The reader goes beyond the text and its intended meaning. From the starting point of the written material, the reader elaborates a meaning by adding details, going off on personal tangents, and fitting things together into a cohesive, comprehensible whole. The reader makes something which has meaning in terms of his or her own experience and being.

The Function of Reading

As one expression of language, reading serves two common functions. These functions are communication and expression. People read in order to gather information, to receive a meaning from what they are reading, and to communicate that meaning from one part of themselves to another. The reader chooses to have an author speak to him or her about a certain topic or a certain category of meaning within the reader's thinking.

Readers also choose to express themselves. An individual may read to clarify personal experience. For example, Muslims or Christians may read the same material as an aid to identification with other people who they consider kindred. A Muslim may read the Koran or a Christian the Bible because they

want their experiences to be more like the experiences of others with which they wish to identify. Psychiatrists are aided in communication because they have read Freud. Medical researchers, doctors, dentists, lawyers, policemen, football players, etc. can communicate with each other because they have constructed common meanings from common readings. In getting estimates for body work on an automobile, I was impressed that every body shop had the same price book and used the same materials for repair work. In each case, the groups of people involved identified with one another, in part, by the materials that they read. The reading materials that they choose are chosen from need or from interest; however, the point is that the choice is made from need or interest. As well, groups are identifiable because of their common reading materials. In some ways, these groups construct their reality partly through the materials that they choose to read.

In a more philosophical sense, readers search for readings that better enable them to define their situations. A reader may say, "Those are the words I was looking for when _____ happended to me" and choose those words or that meaning as his or her own. Whether the reader uses these tools (words) which he or she gained in oral communication or in reading is not important; the reader has these opportunities at his or her disposal. Some readers attempt to discover why they act in a

certain manner or search for answers to questions. Other readers discover written words that make them say "Ah" I'm like this (or "I did this")."

Individuals may read to gain information about themselves in relation to others. Then individuals may be searching for others who feel the same way they do and may ask the questions "Have others had the same experiences that I have had? Do they feel the same way that I do? How are my experiences the same as those of other people?" Thus, their reading attends to a comparison of attitudes, motives, and ideas with the attitudes, motives, and ideas that exist somewhere in print. And, when readers find authors who consistently makes connections with their personal thoughts, they adopt these authors as "favorites". By comparing personal attitudes with the attitudes that are expressed in print, readers can define themselves and satisfy their needs for belonging.

Reading As Liberation

Reading can allow people to travel outside themselves. In novels, especially, an individual can use imagination to become one or more of the characters within the novel and to live the character's life vicariously. This point can help to explain the popularity of adventure stories and romantic novels. The reader is attempting to define himself or herself through

reading. Why does a particular man like to read an adventurous novel? In part, we believe that it is because this particular man has the theoretical concept of "what a man is" partically defined in his head. By identifying as a man, who does certain things and who does not do certain other things, this man can come to identify his experiences with those experiences of another man. In a sense, this man wants to feel more like all other men in order to enhance his self-definition. My son, who is ten years old, is learning to be a man partically by watching what men do and how they live.

Furthermore, the characters that reader's identify with in their reading provide a point of evaluation for the reader's personal life. A reader can ask himself or herself after reading, say Robinson Crusoe, whether his or her life is as exciting as it should be. The reader can actually live in the shoes of the other person and evaluate his or her own life from the other person's viewpoint. By building on personal experience and even projecting beyond it, the reader can create an interior reality. This interior reality allows the reader to compare himself or herself with others from a different perspective.

Margaret Atwood (1972, p. 15) describes this different perspective in her discussion of the uses of art, including literature. She states that art,...

> "as well as a creation to be enjoyed, can also be... a mirror. The reader looks at the mirror and sees not the writer but himself; and behind his own image in the foreground, a reflection of the world he lives in."

Perhaps a main reason for reading is that individuals can be liberated from their own narrow perspective, and can be linked to the rest of the world not only as themselves but as people very much like other people. Through reading readers can learn about others and about themselves and about the world around them; they can learn better about what it is to be human in society and what it means to be an individual person. Reading is both a process of discovery and a process of exploration.

People have a need to make sense of their world, and they try to satisfy this need. They seek out experiences and order them into ways that make sense to them. Reading is a way of standing back and looking at the world and, as a reader, looking at yourself in the world.

The Cure: Worse Than The Disease?

The practical problem, however, is not to understand reading philosophically but to understand it as it is applied to learning. And unfortunately, it is in this application where reading experts fail us. Reading practice deserves continual criticism.

For example, demands for teaching all students to read "on

grade level" have forced both parents and educators to look critically at classroom practice in reading. Many critics feel that students should be able to read better than they do and that schools are in someway responsible for this lack of reading ability shown by students. Unfortunately, in seeking the cure for reading ills, many people have advocated a diagnostic-prescriptive approach, based on a medical model. This model assumes that when a person can not read there is a problem somewhere in that person's "reading act." Problems like disease symptoms can be isolated by expert diagnosis and the disease cured by expert prescription and treatment.

The answer is simple. In order to cure the malady that afflicts the ill reader, the science of diagnosis must be developed to a fine degree. Parts of the reading act become very important because the diagnostician views his or her task as picking the correct part of the reading act that needs fixing and then prescribing the specific cure. The parts of reading become specifically important when one ascribes to this diagnostic-prescriptive approach. The result is that reading is seen as a process that involves a multiplicity of skills, movements, and acts involving such things as timing, sequence, rhythm, etc. The reader is viewed much like an internal combustion engine where the engine runs well if the person reads well or where the engine needs maintenance if the person

reads poorly.

In some ways, this focus on the diagnostic-prescriptive teaching of reading has been a useful development. Management systems divised to support the approach have been great facilitators of individualized instruction in reading and are of consequent benefit to students. At the least, countless children have been provided with materials and instruction at an approriate level of difficulty. However, there is an inherent danger in this emphasis on the diagnostic-prescriptive approach. Individual skills can be spelled out and divided almost indefinitely and the sequence of these skills for instructional purposes can become inflexible and of primary concern in the teaching of reading. In comparison, reading viewed as a wholistic process to be used for a definite purpose receives little, if any attention. The diagnostic-prescriptive approach can, in fact, lead to less individualization because individuals can come to be viewed as machines whose parts need to be repaired or replaced.

As a form of language, reading is a communication process which is used in a certain way for a certain purpose. Recent research has provided insights to the nature of the reading process (Smith, 1977), yet a great deal of the reading process and how reading is learned remains unknown. Most reading skills have been decided upon intuitively and they can be

placed in any one of several sequences, none of which is entirely defensible (Goodman, 1974). Several different kinds of problems are associated with the diagnostic precriptive approach.

The Economic Problem

One increasing problem is that an over-emphasis on diagnosis and precription creates a situation where material producers, armed with expensive "hardware" and "software," make a profit by devising a multiplicity of skill's needs. Good reading programs need lots of "stuff"--"stuff" is expensive. Publishers, by the nature of their business, are more than eager to bring their programs into the schools. In doing so, these publishers often over-simplify the reading process until it becomes the mere "decoding" of the objective messages that they, the materials producers, think are important. These messages may have little interest to kids. The major purpose of materials producers is not to teach everyone to read well. If they succeeded, they could be out of a job. Materials producers are in business first to make money; only secondarily is their interest to help children learn how to read better.

By seperating skill materials, producers can mass produce a large number of skill-sequence exercises. Such mass production may not, however, lend itself to the teaching of

reading, because reading is not simply a series of skill exercises. Reading is an entire perceptual and language experience for the reader. "If the end (of a reading program) is that 'every child will recognize silent e' then the reading program is doomed to failure." (Dennison, 1974).

The Practical Problem

A practical problem exists because the ever-emphasis on diagnosis-prescription and skills exercise is not how people learn how to read. First, an over-emphasis on diagnosis-prescription neglects the fact that children draw on personal experiences and prescriptions in learning how to read. To "read" a word, a child must know the word. The child must be able to place or relate its meaning in a personal way. Meaning making, the essence of reading, is both subjective and personal, as well as being objective. Materials producers can not mass produce personal meaning.

Second, an over-emphasis on diagnosis-prescription and the consequent skills seperation causes the teacher to be more of a mechanical cog and less of a determining factor in the classroom. Yee (1973) states, "The superficial stress upon the mechanical and quantitative tends to put the practioner more 'in line' with the processes than in the development and control of them and perceives learners as 'manipulated' and

conforming recipients instead of interactive individuals." Teachers, who should be in communication with the individual students because they know the individualness of the students much better than an outside source, relinquish their control to a third-person source that knows only students' generic needs and has no idea of their individual needs. Thus, students might be bound to skills sequence that is both rigid and wrong for them as readers. If diagnostic instruments are treated as a total score--which many times happens--the result is a distored picture of a student. A student's test average is not a sufficient criterion to analyze his or her reading abilities.

"In reading, students too often must complete the same worksheets, learn the same skills at the same competency levels, and read the same skills at the same competency levels, and read the same story" (Williams, 1974). If a student is having trouble with the reading skill of syllabication, a typical strategy would be to have him learn some rules and work several worksheets in dividing words into syllables. An over-emphasis on the mechanics of reading can lead to reading classes where students seldom get the opportunity to actually read. And, according to Williams, a student who is having difficulty to read is typically given more of the same exercises and worksheets with which he has already experienced difficulty.

The use of a particular sequence of skills for diagnosis and prescription focuses the attention of both teacher and student on narrow skills for diagnosis and prescription focuses the attention of both teacher and student on narrow skills like attack and comprehension. The use of a particular set of skills and the assessment of reading progress by testing for these very skills can cause a teacher to teach exclusively to those skills. In some schools different rooms with different teachers have been established to teach different reading skills. The students, ranging in age over several grade levels, move from across room to room from teacher to teacher to aquire those skills in which they have been found to be deficient. The students are checked off on their progress records much as shoppers mark off the items on their grocery list as they move through a supermarket. Besides needlessly fragmenting the reading process, this approach ignores the research of development psychologists concerning different learning stages of children by providing the same instruction to children of widely differing ages.

The same problem can occur within a single classroom as an individual student moves from learning station, to skill box, to supplementary instructional material in order to check off the skills listed for work on his contract. The reading process as a whole can be delegated to a secondary role or to

be forgotten entirely. Emphasis on mastering disperate skills involved in becoming a good reader were known, the sum of all those parts would equal the whole. What the reader brings personally to the reading is a criticaly factor that will have been ignored.

The Moral Problem

Some teachers treat diagnostic tests as scores of achievement. The student's self-esteem can be damaged if he or she is labelled a loser for making poor text scores. Students can become stereotyped and a caste system may develop. Teacher's expectations may, in fact, be faulty. Rist (1970), in his study of how the school helps to reinforce the class structure of society, noted how the kindergarten teacher of one class of ghetto children placed them in reading groups which reflected the social class composition of the group of children. That is, the best readers came from the highest socioeconomic groups. Rist's study pointed out that those same reading groups persisted during the children's first several years of elementary school.

Another procedure often followed in the diagnostic-prescriptive approach is the practice of grouping for instruction in children who are revealed as having similar skills needs. This practice can become a mechanical,

thoughtless procedure which treats a group of students with different language abilities and learning styles as the same. As a result, such instruction works against individualization. A nearby service station advertizes itself as a "Diagnostic Car Care Center." The terms may be more appropriately applied to the repair of cars, since engines ususally fail for the same sorts of reasons and all similar engines with the same problems should respond well to the same treatment. Language learners, however, are not mechanical and the learning and use of language is far more complex than the operation of a car engine. Any two or more language learners who have been shown, through some kind of diagnosis, to be lacking the same skill, may well be lacking that skill for different reasons and may need different approaches to the attainment of that skill. Grouping these two learners for similar instruction may meet neither of their needs.

Conclusion

The answer is not to do away with all sequenced lists of reading skills and the diagnostic procedures and instructional activities based upon those lists. Educators have learned somthing about reading skills which children can benefit from learning. The problem is, again, that an exclusive reliance on such arbitrary skill lists ignores reading as a personal

experience. Many of the basic skills involved in playing checkers could be easily assessed. However, that assessment would give little information about how good a checker player that person really is if the person never plays that game.

Most children need instruction in specific skills in reading. However, research in the reading process has provided insights into the process and some implications for teaching reading (Smith, 1975; Goodman, 1973). The fluent reader is one who uses selected graphic, syntactic, and semantic clues from a printed page in order to predict the meaning of the passage. Fluent readers use only enough information from the text to confirm or revise their predictions. The beginning reader who is not familiar with the printed version of language needs a great deal of information from the text in order to piece together meaning. As that reader becomes more efficient, he or she needs less and less printed information.

Since reading is essentially a personal meaning-getting process, there should be a great deal of emphasis on the process as a whole and a principle focus on reading for meaning rather than reading for accuracy. Kids can and do become good readers, good "meaning-makers," in spite of mispronunciations, omitted words, added words, or changed words.

Many of the "disabled" readers that populate our schools are created by instructional approaches that follow a medical

model. A reliance on diagnosis and prescription is not consonsant with how reading research describes how good readers read. Many students become good readers in spite of faulty instruction because they discover how to read on their own. Unfortunately, other students do not learn how to read by themselves. A good number of this second group could avoid becoming "disabled" if reading were taught as a process of coming to understand written passages that students see some purpose in reading. Teaching mastery of separate skills should only be an aid to better reading--it is not better reading.

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